pray for your wonderful mother-in-law and your family members. — *Ed Shroyer, Pekin, Illinois*

I have just returned from a retreat at New Melleray Abbey in Dubuque, Iowa, which is A Trappist monastery founded in 1849. About 35 brothers reside there and provide their own support by farming. Their doors are also open to guests at no charge. One need not be Catholic to stay. Inspired in part by your visits to other churches, I arranged to join them as an associate, a program limited to four men who live with them as they live. There are seven worship services a day, the first being at 3:30 a.m. Each day is filled with private prayer, group study, and hard labor. No naps. It is physically demanding but spiritually rich. Anyone who believes that the monastic life is a retreat from the real world doesn't know what he is talking about. While I am committed to the Church of Christ, I plan on visiting these brethren again. — *Howard Morris, Janesville, Wisconsin*

## BOOK NOTES

*Call Me Blessed* by Faith Martin is a penetrating study on the emerging Christian woman. She says, drawing upon Gal. 3:26, "So far women have been assigned a position in the church that corresponds to their position in society and ignores their rights as sons of God." She humbly but forthrightly comes to terms with "Paul and the Authority of Women," the title of one of her chapters. $8.95 postpaid.

F. F. Bruce's *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* is at last back in print. It is one of the most resourceful books I have ever read. It not only deals with every facet of the apostle's life, but his writings are studied in their historical setting. $21.95 postpaid.

This being the bicentennial year of Alexander Campbell's birth, it is an ideal time to make a serious study of his life and work. I suggest you begin with two great books. The *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* by Robert Richardson is the basic study of his life and times. It is two volumes in one, more than 1100 pages. $21.95 postpaid. *The Campbell-Rice Debate* is heavy but exciting reading, and once you work your way through its 900 pages you will know a lot about what Campbell believed and why he believed it. $19.95 postpaid.

We will send you 18 back issues of this journal for only $3.00, which is not much more than the postage. We do this especially so that our newer readers can catch up on what we've been saying through the years. These are selected at random over the past 15 years.

I find Robert McAfee Brown's *Saying Yes and Saying No On Rendering to God and Caesar* , which meets headon the question of what to do when official government policies seem to clash with the ideals of God's kingdom, a real challenge. He puts all issues to the test of whether they will increase or diminish the chance for children to grow up without fear, hunger, and human diminshment. He discusses Nicaragua, Grenada, South Africa, and Poland, and lots more. You may not agree but you will be exercised. $8.50 postpaid.

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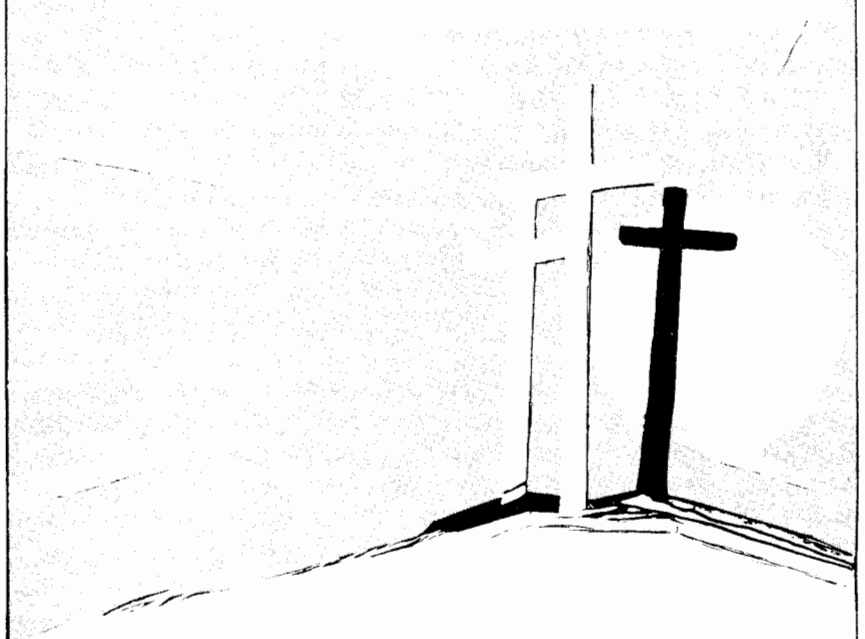
# RESTORATION REVIEW



The church differs from every other society in the world. All other institutions, as compared with her, are of human contriving and are mortal. They have their beginnings and they come to a definite end. This is true of empires, nations, and civilizations. But the church is not of human contriving -- it is divine. It is a supernatural society within a natural environment, "a colony of heaven" as Paul calls it. William Robinson in *The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*

**In This Issue:**

**The Mark of the True Church**

**Volume 30, No. 8** **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **October, 1988**

# "NO PRECEDENT, NO USE": AN EXAMINATION

A rule of interpretation was set forth in a recent issue of the *Gospel Advocate* by Stanley J. Crowley that is worthy of consideration, especially because it summarizes a way of looking at the Bible that has for sometime prevailed among Churches of Christ. It is succinctly stated as "No precedent, no use," which means that if there is not an approved example for a given practice in the New Testament then it is not lawful. Use or practice requires a precedent in Scripture. The writer is addressing the question of the use of instrumental music in particular, and he sets forth his hermeneutics in these words:

> Playing instruments was not a part of the worship of the church in New Testament times. No precedent for the playing of instruments can be found; hence, they must be excluded. To abandon the simple principle of "no precedent, no use" in order to incorporate the playing of musical instruments in our worship assemblies is to establish the foundation for the abandonment of all regulation of Christian corporate worship.

Brother Crowley refers to the *principle* of "no precedent, no use" as if this were a recognized principle of hermeneutics. I would question this. I would be surprised if even one textbook on hermeneutics sets forth any such principle. He speaks of "abandoning" this principle as if it were a recognized rule among us. While "No precedent, no use" has a motto-like ring to it, it is not a motto of the Stone-Campbell movement. Not only is it not listed in the hermeneutical rules set forth by Alexander Campbell, it is a rule that he would not accept.

But it is part of a rule of interpretation set forth by some in Churches of Christ in recent years, and I am not sure who first set it forth. It goes this way: *The Bible teaches (or authorizes) by direct command, approved example, and necessary inference.* While this is a well-known rule among Churches of Christ, I don't think you will find it anywhere else, and one wonders how it ever survived as a rule of interpreting the Bible for even a day. This must be where Stan Crowley picked up his principle of "No precedent (or example), no use."

This three-pronged rule is invalid in each prong, for there are some "direct commands" in the New Testament that are not ongoing in their application. The so-called Jerusalem decree in Acts 15:20 is an instance of this, for there are three

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commands that are generally conceded to be restricted to a given circumstance in that day and time. The command to wash one another's feet is another, at least among Churches of Christ, for we do not believe it is applicable to the modern church. So with the holy kiss, a "direct command" if there ever was one and one that is repeated again and again in the New Testament.

So with precedents or examples. Anyone following a "precedent, use" rule, or its converse "no precedent, no use," has to be very selective in his survey of primitive Christianity. Again, footwashing imposes itself, for it is a precedent as well as a command. Jesus plainly said, "I have given you an example that you should wash one another's feet." Why do we not follow that precedent? The church at Jerusalem practiced communal living by selling its possessions and distributing to each as he had need. Are we to follow that precedent in the 1980's? If not, what happens to our hermeneutics?

That the Scriptures mandate by "necessary inference" is as fuzzy as the first two, for there is no way for us to determine for sure when an inference is necessary and when one is not. I recall a book entitled *Was Jesus Married?"* that argued, both resourcefully and reasonably, that according to Jewish custom and practice it would be unthinkable for a young rabbi like Jesus not to be married. His thesis was an "inference" from Jewish tradition, but is it a "necessary" one? Similarly one might "infer" that if one is not baptized by immersion he cannot possibly go to heaven, but is it a necessary inference? Such an hermeneutics is worthless, for it only involves us in a welter of opinionism.

We would do just as well to forget the "direct command, approved example, necessary inference" bit and simply say what our best thinkers have said since the days of Alexander Campbell, that the Scriptures are to be interpreted by the same "common sense" rules that we use to interpret any other kind of literature.

The riskiest feature of Stan Crowley's "No precedent, no use" rule is that it imposes upon the Bible a position that the Bible does not assume for itself. Where is there the slightest implication in the Bible itself that its precedents or examples are necessarily applicable for all ages and all circumstances? Where is there even a suggestion that the New Testament is an exact blueprint or detailed pattern that sets all the precedents that the church will ever need for millenia to come? To argue that we cannot use some method or practice unless a precedent is found for it in the New Testament is to make the New Testament into a book that it was never intended to be. It also makes it an impossible book to follow, for how could a few first-century churches anticipate all the needs of the church for all time to come. "No precedent, no use" is a rule that no one can or does follow. One simply is not thinking responsibly who so argues.

How about a church having a publishing house, journals, TV and radio programs, owning property, electing trustees for said property? Most all churches have such things and much, much more, including Churches of Christ. A Church

of Christ in Lubbock has a glass elevator! There may be a precedent for such in a Hyatt-Regency, but in the New Testament? And how about a minister of music, youth minister, pulpit minister, Sunday School superintendent (or the Sunday School itself for that matter)? Are there precedents for these things in the New Testament? If a church wants to have a youth camp or a singing school, must it find a precedent in the New Testament?

Brother Crowley's concern is instrumental music, for which he finds no precedent. But he has no problem with written music and song books with either round or shaped notes, for which there is no precedent. Rather than to make a law out of "no precedent," would it not be better to allow each church to decide such matters for itself, according to its own conscience. There are churches, for instance, that sing only from the Psalms, objecting to both written and instrumental music. No precedent, they say. All we have the right to ask of them is not to make a law of God out of their opinion. That is what I ask of my own Church of Christ people: *Don't make a law where God has not made one!* And "No precedent, no use" is a law that God has not made. It is also a legalism that no one can keep with any consistency.

The logic that makes the New Testament a detailed blueprint for the restoration of the true church has a fatal flaw. It implies that there was first the New Testament as we now have it, and that the primitive churches were patterned after that blueprint, precedents and all. But the opposite is the case: the church existed and functioned for centuries before the pattern (New Testament) came along! It was the church that produced the New Testament, not the other way around. How then could the New Testament be the pattern for the church?

Moses needed a pattern for the building of the tabernacle, and so Heb. 5:8 says that he was told, "See that you make all things according to the pattern." Moses had a pattern at hand and he built the tabernacle according to the pattern. But the church is not like that. The tabernacle was built by men, but Heb. 8:2 refers to the "true tabernacle," which is the church, "which the Lord built, not man." There is no "pattern" for the church, for the Lord built it and he needs no pattern. If men had needed a pattern for the church like Moses needed for the tabernacle, God would have given them one in the first century before the first church started. Then the New Testament churches would not have been so different from each other! When men build houses they need a pattern, but when God builds one no pattern is needed. And who pitched the true tabernacle, man or God?

But that doesn't make the New Testament any less important, it only liberates it from being a legalistic instrument. It is important because it points us to our *living* pattern, Jesus Christ our Lord. We are to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus, not to the presumed blueprint of any book. But the Scriptures are extremely helpful in revealing to us the image of Christ to which we are to be conformed. And the New Testament discloses the great drama of people becoming the Body of Christ and living according to that ideal, even if falteringly. The New Testament is therefore



more descriptive than prescriptive. And so their experience, their victories and their defeats, becomes the word of God to us in our resolve to be the Body of Christ in our generation. But this does not necessarily mean that we are to do precisely as they did and nothing but what they did, but that we are to do for our day what they did for theirs, *hasten the kingdom of God into our troubled world. the Editor*

## ARE WE TO FELLOWSHIP THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

An article in the July issue of *Spiritual Sword*, published by the Getwell Church of Christ in Memphis, entitled "Should We Fellowship the Christian Church" caught my eye. The article concludes with a ringing assertion that *We can have no fellowship with the Christian Church!*

One could hardly find a better (or should I say worse ) example of what has happened to the Church of Christ mentality in reference to that beautiful word fellowship than in this article. In the very question raised there is a crucial misunderstanding of the meaning of fellowship, for "the sharing of the common life," which is what the word means, is between persons, not institutions or organizations.

Presuming that the "We" in the question is the Church of Christ, I would have to agree that the Church of Christ cannot fellowship the Christian Church, or vice versa for that matter. In the light of Scripture, *Koinonia* (fellowship) is only between persons and between persons and God. Christians are in fellowship only with each other and the Lord, not denominations or religious bodies.

The Bible could hardly be clearer than it is on this truth, such as: "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Indeed, even the construction of the English translation indicates this, *ship* suggests relationship, as in companionship and friendship. So *fellow* and *ship* is a relationship between fellows. It is a people thing (and people and God), not an institutional thing.

The question raised reminds me of those George Whitefield would ask of Abraham in his preaching back in Colonial America, which anticipated some of the thinking of the Stone-Campbell Movement which came along generations later. "Father Abraham, have you any Episcopalians in heaven?," he would ask. Abraham would answer in the negative. No Episcopalians in heaven. "Any Presbyterians?," Whitefield would go on asking. No Presbyterians, Abraham would reply. On and on Whitefield would go, naming the various sects. Finally Abraham would say, "We have only Christians here!"

In a similar vein I would say that we are not in fellowship with Presbyterians, Methodists, Roman Catholics, or whatever, but only with Christians. But surely we are in fellowship with all Christians, including those that are "not of us." They do not have to be "of us" but only "of Christ," and all those who are "of Christ" are in fellowship with each other.

An equally damaging fallacy in the question "Are we to fellowship the Christian Church?" is the implication that fellowship is a commodity at our disposal and over which we have control. It implies that *Koinonia* is ours to extend or to withdraw. While this is true of approval or endorsement, it cannot be true of fellowship, for only God determines its parameters and only He determines who is in the fellowship and who is not.

Again, the Scriptures are clear in this regard, as in 1 Cor. 1:9: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). It is God who calls us into Christian fellowship, and 2 Thess. 2:14 reminds us that we received that call when we heard and obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ. If God calls us to *Koinonia* by way of the gospel, how much do men have to do with it? And on what grounds can men determine who is in the fellowship and who is not? Is fellowship ours to extend and withdraw at will?

Part of the problem here is that fellowship is confused with approval or endorsement. True, one may not approve or endorse what some denomination teaches or practices, but this has little or nothing to do with fellowship, which is a relationship that exists between a person and God and with other persons. I may not endorse the error that is espoused by a fellow Christian, but we may still be within the fellowship of Christ together. It was so in New Testament times. Paul so disapproved of the conduct of Peter on one occasion that he afterward wrote "I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal. 1:11). But they were still in Christ together and still in fellowship.

Another way to put it is that we can no more monitor who is in our fellowship than we can pass on who is in our family. My father beget and my mother gave birth to eight children. That made the eight of us brothers and sisters. I was next to the last to be born. When the baby of the family came along six years after I was born, no one asked if I would receive him into the family. I was not consulted. I had nothing to do with his becoming my brother. I was stuck with him. We were brothers, not because we approved of each other, but because we had the same parents. How we would get along in the ensuing years would depend on what brotherhood meant to us and whether we received and loved each other as brothers ought, even when we disagreed.

It is that way in God's family. We are begotten of the Word and born of water and the Spirit. God is our Father and the New Jerusalem is "the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26). This brings us into "the fellowship of the Spirit" (Philip. 2:1). It is the Spirit's fellowship, not ours. In whatever heart the Holy Spirit dwells there is



*Koinonia*. If the Spirit dwells in you and in me, then we are in the fellowship together. The same thing that makes us Christians makes us *fellows together in Christ, hence fellowship*. Whether we yet like each other or agree with each other or approve of each other is another matter. There are many brothers who are not on speaking terms, but they are nontheless brothers. So it is in Christ. We can accept each other as fellows in Christ when we may not yet choose to be close friends. I may even believe that you are "in error" on some matters (Who isn't?), but that does not negate the fact of brotherhood and fellowship. We are stuck with each other, but our mutual love for Christ should contrain us to "Receive one another, even as Christ has received you" (Rom. 15:7).

If we are concerned that we might be in fellowship with "brothers in error," it helps to realize that we have no other kind. We are slow to believe the plain words of Jas. 3:2, "We all stumble in many things," and 1 Jn. 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Who among us can say, in the light of such passages, that he does not stumble and sin? Can we not then enjoy fellowship with each other when we are far less than perfect?

We hear much of "withdrawing fellowship," so much so that one would suppose it is a biblical concept. These days we even have churches that "withdraw" from other churches. There is nothing like that in the New Testament, and "withdrawing fellowship" or its equivalent is nowhere found. Rom. 16:17 makes mention of certain factionists that were to be "marked" and "avoided," a measure taken to secure the peace of the young church, but there is no reference to fellowship as such. To "mark" a problem brother is simply to take note of him, and to "avoid" him is to not allow him to do his disruptive work. He is still a brother and still in the fellowship, but he has become a problem and must be dealt with as such.

The "withdrawal" text is presumed to be 2 Thess. 3:6, which in the KJV reads "withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly," and of course "disorderly" is made to refer to everything from getting a divorce to using a piano in church. But the context makes it clear that the apostle was referring to peope who did not do their fair share of the work, which led him to say that if one would not work he should not eat. Most any other translation will make it clear that this is no injunction to "withdraw fellowship" from certain ones and thus kick them out of the church. Such as the *New English Bible:* "Hold aloof from every Christian brother who falls into idle habits." Verse 11 of the same chapter further describes the "disorderly" as "not working at all, but are busybodies." We can warn such ones (see 1 Thess. 5:14), discipline such ones, and "hold aloof" such ones without presuming to exclude them from the fellowship of Christ. This is apparent from 1 Thess. 3:14-15 where Paul goes on to tell the church not to keep company with these idlers, then adds "Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

Only the One who calls us into the fellowship of the Spirit can cast us from that fellowship. Only Christ can remove the candlestick from a church, and only Christ

can cast a member from his Body, for only he is its head. A church can and should of course discipline its members in love, as the above verses indicate, but this need not involve "withdrawing fellowship," which is the prerogative of no one, however much it is assumed by popes, councils, and elderships.

While the expulsion of the fornicator in 1 Cor 5 is sometimes cited as a prooftext for this pontifical behavior, its situation is so unique that it hardly serves as a pattern for the modern church. In the first place, it was a personal representative of Jesus Christ that did it, the apostle Paul, which cannot be duplicated by any modern church. Paul said that even though he was absent he had already judged in the case (verse 3), and their action was based on Paul being present "in spirit," and so the evil doer was delivered unto Satan, just as if the apostle himself issued the condemnation. What congregation today can presume to deliver one of its members unto Satan?

We might deduce from 1 Cor 5 that it would be appropriate for a congregation to recognize publicly that certain ones have conducted themselves in such a way that it is presumed that they have cut themselves off from Christ and therefore from His church and from the fellowship of that congregation. But even this must be done with great caution and with guarded words, for since we are fallible we can never really know when one has been cut off from Christ. What we must make clear is that only Christ can remove the candlestick either from a church or from the life of an individual. We can only say that when it appears that this has happened, we want to act consistent with that and thus remove the person's name from our register and no longer regard him as a brother. But we must never forget that one may be excommunicated by a church whom Christ has not excommunicated.

The brother's question about having fellowship with the Christian Church raises one further point: we seem more inclined to draw the line of fellowship than to obey the injunction of Scripture: *Accept one another, even as Christ has accepted you* (Rom. 15:7). We should think positively in terms of accepting those with whom we differ than in terms of rejecting them. Is that not more Christlike? If Christ were as hard on us as we are of each other, where would we be? — *the Editor*

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# NOT "WHY" BUT "WHEN"

At the nursing home here in Denton that I visit regularly I have several friends that have no doubt often asked *Why?* There is Zelda who in her mid 70's is too young to be confined to a nursing home the rest of her life, but she has a malady that causes her to faint and fall, so she can no longer live alone. She has buried two husbands and has no children. There are thousands like her in nursing homes across the country, doomed to a loneliness that has no visitors. Loneliness is a dreadfully bitter experience to bear. But our Lord, who was tempted in all the ways that we are, bore this trial also. The great preacher, Horace Bushnell, often preached on "The Loneliness of Christ." This is the word that often hammers in my mind when I visit these homes, *loneliness*. It is a devastating emotion. That Jesus knows what it is to be lonely can be of great comfort to these people.

Hopelessness also pervades nursing homes. Usually patients do not go there until all hope of a normal life is lost. The poet, Alexander Pope, was speaking as a secular humanist, when he wrote that lovely line "Hope springs eternal in the human breast." Lovely but false! There are many of the world's distressed who no longer have any hope that life will be any better for them, not in this world at least.

Several in the home have Alzheimer's, which is as dreaded a disease today as leprosy was in the ancient world. It is shocking to see how quickly this malady can destroy one who was only recently in the best of health. One man so afflicted cries out as if he were a wild man, and it is not known why he does this. I figure it might stem from his frustration of no longer being able to communicate, a man of whom it is said, "He knew everybody in Denton." But now he recognizes nobody, maybe not even his wife. And how exemplary that woman is. She was a school teacher who retired early in order to care for her husband in the early stages of Alzheimer's. When she finally had to put him in a nursing facility, she was there several times a day to comfort him. I sometimes visit with her as she sits beside the man she has been married to almost a half century. She talks of their youthful struggles together, their children, their values, and of her fears and guilt. She admits that she often asks, *Why?*

Then there is my young friend Chris, who was left a quadraplegic by an auto accident that killed both parents. He is a smart 15-year old who has learned to operate a computer by head movements. I often read to him, stories about nature and from the Bible. He is always attentive and appreciative. He can hear but cannot speak. Our visits are always positive. I talk with him frankly about his condition, that even though he may never be able to speak or walk or use his arms that he can nevertheless be productive, and that he must never feel sorry for himself but meet the world headon. And I assure him that once this life is courageously and faithfully lived that there will be another world where all the wrongs of this world are made right.

Once when I dropped by to see Chris some Pentecostals were there to take him to a healing service. They received permission from his guardian, an aunt, who herself has cancer. They were all on a high. Chris was going to church to be healed. Chris himself was gleeful. Knowing the severity of his condition (the Scottish Rite hospital for children has performed numerous operations on him), I felt terribly uneasy as they wheeled him away to be healed. What would it do to his faith in God that we often talked about?, I asked myself. I did not of course challenge the well-intentioned Pentecostals, and I never questioned Chris about it afterward.

I keep on telling him not to ask *Why?* but to deal with the *When*. There is no point in asking the old question over and over again, *Why did this happen to me?*, for it is a question that has no answer. One could just as well ask, Why should this not have happened to me if it ever happens to anybody? Forget the why, for it only gets in the way. Deal with the when: *when these things happen to me, what am I to do?*

Chris has a good mind and good eyesight. Instead of playing the "poor me" game he is playing on a computer, one designed especially for him. Down the road he might be another scientist out on the frontiers of the cosmos like Stephen Hawking. God may sometimes show His glory through healing, but He also does wondrous deeds through those that are handicapped. It was this great truth that the Lord impressed upon Paul: "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

While I realize it is harder done than said, our aim should be to be content with whatever circumstance befalls us, especially in those instances where we have no control over what happens to us. But we can with God's help control our attitude toward what happens. This great passage offers encouragement: *Be content with such things as you have* (Heb. 13:5). It is not an easy thing to say to a quadraplegic or to a woman whose husband is wasting away before her eyes, but the same verse assures us of a promise that gives us the power to do the impossible: "For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'"

That Scripture goes on to give the believer's cry of victory: "So we may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" It could just as well read, "What can *circumstances* do to me? I will not fear! Why? We have the one assurance that matters, the Lord is with us and he will never forsake us, no matter what. And if He is with us He will work for good in all the things that happen to us. It may well be that having Alzheimer's or being a quadraplegic are among the worse things that can happen to us in this world. There is no way of seeing them as God's will for any of us. But they happen in God's world, and they happen to the best of us as well as to the worst of us.

There is nothing to be gained in asking why when such evils befall us, but there is much to be gained when we keep on believing that God is with us and that we need not fear. We can even believe that while God did not bring the evil upon us, He will work in and through it for our ultimate good. Such is the promise in Rom. 8:28, and note how the *New English Version* puts it: "In everything, as we know, God cooperates for good with those who love God." What a blessed promise! In everything that happens God is there with us (He never leaves us or forsakes us!) working with us for our good.



Working with us! Cooperating with us! That shows that we have a response to make. We must yield to His will, which may be resignation and contentment to what cannot be helped. And to forget all the whys. We must show the courage that accepts those things in life that cannot be changed. Contentment!

And to believe that in the end, in God's tomorrow, which is all that really matters anyway, God will work it all for good. If some tragic circumstance in this life is used of God to make me a more beautiful soul both in this world and in the world to come, then I will in the end praise God for the tragedy. And when we really believe that He is with us and that He will do as He has promised, then we can praise Him even now for all that happens to us. "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18).

If we will but believe, we can say as did one great saint who learned to live with God in this world the hard way (and is there really any other way?): *It was good for me that I was afflicted* (Ps. 119:71). *—the Editor*

## THE MARK OF A TRUE CHURCH

Somewhere in his voluminous writings Karl Barth ventured to identify the one sure mark of a true church. It is not unlike the crusty old theologian to be so daring. And so surprising. Some years ago when the famous Swiss was visiting an American seminary, he was asked to name the greatest idea he ever had. The inquirer might have expected one of the most influencial theologians in the world to draw something from Hegelian idealism or Kantian metaphysics, but if so he was in for a surprise. He said the greatest idea he ever had he learned at his mother's knees, and he sang, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."That's Karl Barth!

When he was asked to identify a true church, he again spoke in simple terms: A true church is where the power of Christ is present in the lives of the people. The time was when I was incapable of comprehending such an answer as that to a question that I often heard raised. When I was a student at Freed-Hardeman and Abilene, where I studied with the foremost in the Church of Christ, we had sermon outlines on how to identify the true church. The identifying marks were the right name, right worship, right organization, right practice, and of course the right plan of salvation. One illustration intrigued me, one that I used myself. If I tell you to meet my cousin at the train, you will know who he is because he'll be wearing a

white suit, a straw hat, and will have an umbrella in one hand and a bird cage in the other. The point of course was that it is as easy to identify the true church as it would be to find my cousin.

I sometimes wonder, thinking about those days, what would have been the response if someone had suggested in brother Hardeman's class that the way to find the true church is to look for the power of Christ. The response might have been positive. Ideas like that simply didn't come up. I think we were all terribly deprived. The power of Christ in a church! We did talk about the power of the gospel, and we memorized Rom. 1:16 — all good stuff — but we never thought of "the true church," a term we often used, in reference to the power of Christ.

I also wonder how Prof. Barth would have responded if one of his students had referred to the true church in terms of name, doctrine, organization, and practice. Again it might have been positive, for all those things have importance, but I suspect he would have cautioned against having form without substance, a church without the Spirit, and he might have pointed to 2 Tim. 3:5, "having a form of godliness but denying its power."

We all well know that one can have the most elegant piece of machinery, such as a computer, and that it is worthless if it is not plugged into the power. It means nothing to have a Mercedes in the driveway if it has no power system. Our VCR has a button marked "Power: On. Off." Even a child knows that nothing happens if the power is off.

There is that kind of thinking in Barth's distinction between a true and a false church. The true church is where the power of Christ is turned on. This would at least mean the power of forgiveness, love, and peace in the lives of the people. It would include a joyous unity amidst diversity, such as is implied in 1 Cor. 12:4: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit."

Some of us have been a long time understanding the power that Paul speaks of in Rom. 14:17: "The kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." The false church, we may presume, is the one that supposes that the kingdom is a matter of being right about food and drink or forms and procedures and knows nothing of the joy of the Holy Spirit. We are also slow to see the likes of 1 Cor. 4:20: "The kingdom of God is not in word but in power." This may be an ellipsis, "not in word only but also in power," for the kingdom certainly includes the proclamation of the word. But if there is the word (and all churches profess to teach the word) without the power it is not a "kingdom of God" church. At the least the passage is saying that the word must be preached with power, and that our lives must reflect the power of Christ, not only his teaching.

Our worship services are often boring and lifeless. There is no sense of urgency. Preachers orate lackadaisically and a listless spirit permeates our assemblies. It all seems routine, a kind of humdrum, hands-in-pocket, take-it-or-leave-it attitude. In what we call "fellowshipping together" there is far more small talk than Christ talk. Preachers need to rev it up, but without shouting. Enthusiasm! If a preacher doesn't put fire in his sermons, he ought to put his sermons in the fire. We are too laid back. We need to be more like the winning team in the dressing room after a Super Bowl game.



Many of our folk seem to find church so meaningless that they must view it as an ordeal to be endured out of duty. They feel guilty if they "forsake the assembly." They arrive at the last moment if not late, and they leave as soon as possible, speaking to no one and giving nothing of themselves to the service, or so it seems. They may not sing and may not even listen. They are languid, listless, and lifeless. Not only are they not "aglow with the Spirit," as the Scriptures urge, but they seem unaware that the Holy Spirit has come to us as a guest of heaven.

But I have more sympathy for them than censure. We have so institutionalized the church and professionalized the ministry that "the love of many has waxed cold," to quote Jesus. We have become so much like the world and other elite churches that we have little concept of "Body life" or what the Bible describes as "the whole body grows and builds itself up in love" (Eph. 4:16). We have a professional in the pulpit, "the pulpit minister" we now call him, who often commands a salary far beyond those of comparable education and background, who satisfies more than he edifies. He is part of the System that is more concerned for getting a crowd and meeting the budget than in reaching out to the poor and oppressed of the world. We spend most of our great wealth on ourselves and in building our own denomination. All this gives us form, but does it give us power?

Yes, our people not only become bored but disillusioned when they are cut off from "the resources of power" (Eph. 1:19) that God intends for them in his ekklesia. The message they get is that they are not supposed to think for themselves or entertain a new idea or suggest a new way of doing things. They are repeatedly brainwashed to submit to "the authority of the eldership," which is one of those myths that keeps us tied to the mentality of the 1930's. It usually means that the elders are never to be questioned, never mind what decision they make. And it nearly always means that the rank and file members, who pay the bills, have no part whatever in the decision-making process. The women, who are often the ablest in making decisions, are not only never consulted but hardly have any place at all in the ministry of the congregation. Our churches are made up of spectators, who, unlike their Lord, come to be ministered to, not to minister. All this means stagnation. No power!

To overcome this weakening syndrome our elders must become the shepherds of the flock as the Scriptures teach and quit functioning as if they were corporate executives. The congregation must learn the power of Body life and ministry. Our hired preachers must cease being pastors in the churches and go out into the world as evangelists. We can't "go" for God in a world aflame unless we're plugged in.

Moreover, we must cease nursing our sectarianism and start dealing with it forthrightly, for it is a root cause of our powerlessness. So long as we do not accept other Christians as equals and preserve the old mentality that we are the only true church we will be ineffective in a world that can be won for Christ only by a loving and united church. More of our preachers must find that "convenient season" to say what they really believe about our debilitating sectarianism, even if it means letting their jobs be hanged. "God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:7).

Another way to say all this is that we must recover the proclamation, purpose, and power of the ancient Christian faith. The proclamation is that Jesus is the risen Christ, a message that is to be preached, not to those who have already heard it, but to a lost and dying world. The purpose is the salvation of the world and the building up of the Body of Christ. The power is faith in the risen Christ and the joy of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Paul says it well in Rom. 15:13: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." The apostle names joy, peace, faith, and the Holy Spirit as resources of power. He goes on in the next verse to name simple goodness, knowledge, and mutual ministry: "I myself am satisfied about you, my brethren, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another."

It isn't really all that difficult if we are interested in recovering the power of the ancient gospel for the living of these days. The facts and truths are all there, as are the resources of power. The question that remains is whether we are willing to plug in. — *the Editor*

**THE WORKS OF W. CARL KETCHERSIDE**

We are pleased to announce that most of the writings of Carl Ketcherside are soon to be published in eleven beautiful hardbound volumes, which will make for a library matching set. It will include all volumes of the *Mission Messenger* from 1957-1975, which are the crucial years of his editorial work in behalf of unity and fellowship. These have long been out-of-print and unavailable at any price.

Besides *Mission Messenger,* thirteen other books by Carl Ketcherside will be included in the set, all of which have been unavailable, such as *Heaven Help Us, Talks to Jews and Non-Jews, A Cean Church, The Death of the Custodian, Parable of Telstar, The Royal Priesthood.*

The regular price will be $175.00, but the pre-publication price is $139.00. If you want a set, you should place your order at once, but send no money until we bill you. The supply will be limited, so we advise you to reserve your copy without delay. This set may well be the most significant publication among the heirs of the Stone-Campbell Movement in recent years. If for no other reason, you should have a set to pass along to your posterity.



# A "MONKEY WRENCH" SCRIPTURE

Cecil Hook

On the farm as I was growing up we had few wrenches for our implements, but we needed few. Our tool set consisted mostly of a monkey wrench. In those "olden" days our simple implements were put together with bolts and square-headed nuts, and a monkey wrench could be adjusted to fit any size of nut.

In those times of my youth there was much argumentation by sincere people about matters of religion. Many of our issues were simplistically square-headed, or maybe we were the square-headed nuts! A scripture reference that seemed to be adjustable to fit all issues was 2 John 9: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (KJV).

This proof-text was used to condemn individual communion glasses, a second serving of the Lord's Supper on Sunday night, the use of wine in the Lord's Supper, classes, women teachers, uninspired literature, women cutting their hair, instrumental music, baptistries, eating in the building, orphanages, and most anything else that one might be inclined to be cantankerous about. None of these were condemned by Christ or his apostles.

The application of this "monkey wrench" scripture lifted the most insignificant detail into a matter of life and death, and I fear it brought more death than life. The argument made from 2 John 9 was that if one practiced any of these things not taught by Christ, he thereby abandoned God and Christ. He "hath not God!" Those who rejected the innovations had the assurance that "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."

If a brother went beyond the teaching of Christ in any of these matters, he was not to be bidden God speed or received into one's house, for, according to verse 11 "He that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds." It is a blessing that this use of 2 John 9 was only selective, for otherwise every minor detail would have been screwed down so tightly that we could not have operated.

Since I sort of inherited this argument, it seemed right to me and I made use of it during much of my ministry. The time came, however, when I could no longer honestly ignore the context of the passage, and I quit using it the way I once did.

And what does the context reveal about what John meant by the doctrine of Christ? Doctrine and teaching are synonyms, identical in meaning. The doctrine/teaching of Christ has two possible meanings: the doctrine which Christ taught or the doctrine about Christ. Which meaning is intended in 2 John 9?

There is much in John's writings that deals with the Gnostic influence among the early disciples. Their main contention was that Christ did not really come in the flesh. And so the apostle warns in 2 John 7, "Many deceivers have gone into the

world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist" (RSV).

This is clearly referring to teaching *about* Christ. Such antichristian teaching would indeed separate one from God and Christ, as John warns in verse 9, for the incarnation of our Lord is basic to the Christian faith. John was not referring to their neglect of some law, and much less to the violation of such scrupulous details as I have listed above. There is a vast difference between the gravity of denying that Christ came in the flesh and an opinion about women teaching or Bible classes.

One would suppose that after a half century of enlightenment we would no longer hear 2 John 9 used as a "monkey wrench" prooftext. But, to our dismay, we still hear the old arguments and cliches, but always selectively. None who relies on this prooftext dares to make a general application of it. It is a tool conveniently used to condemn what someone opposes when it cannot be condemned by a responsible handling of Scripture.

These thoughts in no way imply the slightest disregard for the doctrine/ teaching *of* Christ or of the inspired writers. It is rather a plea for honesty in the application of their teaching. — *1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Tx. 78130.*

*Visiting Other Churches...No. 8*

## THE ROMAN CATHOLICS: POISED FOR CHANGE

We would all do well to attend mass at a Roman Catholic Church occasionally, and to learn to appreciate what mass means to a member of that communion. The term *mass*, which is also used by some liturgical Protestant churches, may be a foreboding word to most Protestants, but it means to a Roman Catholic what Communion or the Lord's Supper means to us. The word *mass* comes from a Latin word that the priest says at the close of the ceremony which means *dismissed, you may go*, except that these days amidst all the change in the Roman Church mass is usually said in English.

But mass in English is not the only change. The sacrament, and in the Roman Church mass is a sacrament, which means it is within itself efficacious (a blessing), has been greatly simplified. Over many centuries there was "high mass," with its elegant ceremony of a deacon singing the gospel and a sub deacon singing the epistle while another deacon poured wine into the chalice at the offertory and then covered and uncovered the chalice during the canon (prayer of consecration). Then there was incense, ringing of bells, the introit (chanting of a Psalm), and most important



of all the elevation, which goes back to 1210 A.D., when the priest lifts the host (bread) and the chalice high enough for the congregation to see them, and at that moment, when the priest says the words of institution ("This is my blood" etc.) the elements become the bread amd body of Christ. There is also the view in Roman Catholic theology that the whole person of Christ is actually present at the elevation.

While this elaborate ritual was simplified through the centuries, giving place to the "low mass," which can be performed by a single priest, such as a chaplain on a field of battle or by a priest in a private home (funerals, weddings), the Roman mass forever finds its essence in the elevation of "the blessed sacrament" and the words of institution, at which moment Christ is actually present.

You can imagine what this means to a Roman Cathoic, who believes that right before his eyes (an ancient papal rule was that the sacrament had to be lifted at least as high as the breast so that the people could witness the miracle) Jesus Christ is actually present. And then he eats of that body and drinks of that blood, a sacrament! One change in Roman liturgy is that while for centuries only the priest drank from the chalice while the people partook of the host, it is now common for mass to be served to the people in "both kinds."

Once you sit with Roman Catholics at mass and see what the Eucharist means to them, you can appreciate why they would be amazed to see a Protestant church serve the Supper so unceremoniously. In most Churches of Christ/Christian Churches, for instance, we do not even say the words of institution, as our Lord did "on the night that he was betrayed." We read Scripture, say a word about its meaning, give thanks, and serve. We could at least elevate the bread and say, "This is the body of Christ," as Jesus did. We are also too eager to emphasize that the elements are only "symbolic," a word Jesus did not use. He said the bread was his body and the cup was his blood. Why do we have to be so theological, or is it anti-theological?

Even the Roman Catholics will concede that if you take "the blessed sacrament" at the moment of elevation and have them chemically analyzed in a laboratory they will have the components of wine, wheat, etc. and not human flesh and blood. So why argue about it? Why can't we say "This is the blood of Christ" (period) like the Roman Catholics do — and like Jesus did! And we should *say* it and not just think it.

My visit to the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Denton was as delightful as any visit that I have made. It has the reputation of being a bit untraditional, even maverick, and one only needs to visit to get the impression that it might be a cross between traditional Roman and charismatic Pentecostal. We held hands and embraced, we sang heart songs, there was audience responses, clapping, joyous praise, and an openness that surprised and delighted me. The sermon, by an Hispanic priest (in Denton, Texas!) was biblical and enthusiastic, as much Protestant as Catholic. There was life!

There was a sharing time like we have at our church. That's when we held hands and hugged and blessed each other. Unlike other churches I have visited, I was not treated as a visitor, but as part of the family. I was especially impressed when a young man in a business suit got up to testify. In a Roman Catholic church, I said to myself, I can't believe this! But what he said was even more remarkable. He told of growing up in Denton in an unchurched home. He then named an old couple, pointing to them in the audience, who invited him to their church while he was in high school. He began to study religion and the Bible and eventually became a member at Immaculate Conception. He emphasized how he was saved from the world and from sin and how he found the Lord he had always ignored. And now he was going to become a priest. He named the bishop in Dallas who had arranged for him to attend seminary in San Antonio. A Denton boy, he called himself, who found God when a neighbor showed enough interest to invite him to church. He was telling his home congregation goodbye, and that he would one day come back home as a priest.

I had the thought that it could have been Ouida and I that invited him to our church. He would have found the Lord at the Church of Christ. And would he have gone to Abilene and become one of our preachers? In that event he would not need nearly as much education, he could marry, and in a few years he might be making $100,000 a year at one of our big churches.

And I wondered what God thinks about it all. That is what happens to me when I visit other churches. Maybe you had better not try it. — *the Editor*

## OUR CHANGING WORLD

This is the first time in our 36 years of publication that an issue has been piled up in mail bags for several days ready to be taken to the post office. We got it ready well ahead of time. When Ouida unloads it on the dock at the post office on 1 October, I will be in the Philippines, the Lord willing. By the time it reaches your house I should be in India. After three weeks there I will fly by Singapore Airlines to Singapore for a brief visit with friends, and then on to Auckland, New Zealand on Air New Zealand, arriving there 27 October, if the Lord grants safe travel. I leave Auckland at 9:40 p.m. on 6 November on United Airlines and arrive in Los Angeles at 4:07 p.m. the same day, five hours before I leave New Zealand! That is because, of course, I gain a day. Then on to Dallas by American Airlines. En route to Philippines and India I fly Northwest Airlines, Philippine Air, and Indian Air. Danny New, a missionary with Wycliffe Translators, and Walt Prevost of Cebu Seminary will be my hosts in the Philippines. Ralph Harter, missionary in Kanpur, and Leah Mosheer, director of a Christian school in Kulpahar, will be my hosts in India. They will all conspire to keep me busy teaching. In New Zealand I will serve as a resource person for the Campbell Bicentennial celebration at the World Convention of Churches of Christ and enjoy fellowship with heirs of our Movement from many nations of the world. I will arrive home in time to vote on Election Day and help Ouida mail our November issue, late this time, unless she has already mailed it. She will prepare it for the printer on our computer from stuff I send her abroad. The reason I can do all this is because I start each day by running two miles, and because I'm married to Ouida!



Duane Dunning in *The Reformer*, edited by Buff Scott., Jr. makes a helpful observation about Biblical interpretation. He notes that one way to distinguish what is more important in Scripture than other things is to consider the circumstance under which something is said, such as Christ's words spoken while he was on the Cross or his intercessory prayer as he faced the Cross. He observed that very important truths are also determined by whether they are related to salvation and by the emphasis given to them by the writers. Subs to *The Reformer*, 1003 Pilot Ave., cherokee, Iowa 51012, are only $3.00 per annum.

The Boston Church of Christ program has come to Dallas, with a new congregation starting in one of the hotels. While the mainline Church of Christ has been less than enthusiastic about this work, it stands almost alone among our people as an effective evangelistic program. While others of us may talk about evangelism, they practice it, and they know and utilize the principles of church growth. And they are not interested in building buildings, being content to gather in homes and rented halls. Their growth has been phenomenal. A member of one of their churches, who is an enthusiastic reader of this paper, told me recently by phone that he has outreach meetings in his home almost daily, and that he has found the Boston program to be a great relief from the arrogance and sectarianism of the Church of Christ he had known before. He assured me that most of the bad things said about the Boston work were false, at least from his perspective from their congregation in Indianapolis. I say more power to them!

When President Bok of Harvard gave his Commencement address this year, he presented some facts that he considers alarming. He said, "Less than 2 percent of the students plan to teach in public schools, and virtually none (less than one percent) are interested in the ministry for which the College was founded." The percentage of students interested in public service has also radically dropped in recent years, he noted. The reason? Money and prestige.

## READER'S EXCHANGE

Nell left us very suddenly. She died almost immediately of a massive heart attack. I opened the bathroom door, not having heard a sound from her. She was lying doubled up with her head between the stool and the tub. I tried to get her to say something but she was gone. She detested formality so much that at her large funeral service at two places, here and at Flat River, I spoke briefly, then introduced Sue who read the poem enclosed. The four grandchildren sang her favorite song. I asked for those who wanted to pay tribute to her to raise their hands and speak, and we followed with a few words from a brother. I went back to work teaching the next morning. It was hard. God bless you. — *Carl Ketcherside, 4420 Jamieson, IC, St. Louis, Mo. 63109.*

Thanks for all the spiritual strength, encouragement, "road maps," spiritual oases and islands of self-renewal. Thanks particularly for sharing with us your very personal lives — deaths, weddings, visits to other parts of the Body. I could not feel closer to you were you my very family. — *Kathy and Phil Wyler, Victorville, CA.*

We will hate the day when you put down your pen for the last time. *Restoration Review* has been so much a part of our lives and so many other lives it has touched. We